The Olivetree Review

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Fear and Flesh

by Aaron Sommers **Prose**

1.

On an exquisite afternoon in May of 1998, commencement speaker James "Big Mac" McMahon distracts Merrimack College's graduating class by yelling, "son of a bitch," tumbling into the lap of Provost Jenn G. Richards and dropping dead.

2.

Professor of Chemistry Mike Freidman orders his colleagues to, "give [Mr. McMahon] some fucking air." Associate Professor of Poetry Bridgette Bailey places her handkerchief on McMahon's clammy forehead. Professor of Biology Phil Browne springs from his seat, pushes Freidman aside, tears Mr. McMahon's shirt open and takes a crack at cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Browne's chest compressions are hindered by Freidman's haranguing and Browne's lack of certification in the life-saving technique. Chief Cardiologist Dr. Francis Butterworth comments in The Trustees' Incident Information Report, "[Browne] panicked. He acted quixotically, cavalierly, and—to be blunt—with inordinate asininity. [Browne] probably fractured Mr. McMahon's ribs and bruised his sternum during that pathetic, bungled attempt."

Emergency Medical Technicians arrive. An unruly student body and Mr. McMahon's hirsuteness hamper their defibrillation treatments. Eighteen-hundred Volts and three tubes of K-Y Jelly later, Big Mac is finally hoisted onto a stretcher.

Students report a panorama of revulsion and confusion. Sophomore Tim Triplett witnesses, "Something out of a bad horror movie. Fucked [sic] up stuff." The scene gets worse when, "[Mr. McMahon] flopped around with his tongue hanging out. People were yelling and crying. I saw a bunch of sparks and smoke and hair and shit fly off him. Then [Mr. McMahon] lets out this yelp—like a weird growl or something—right before they put him in [the ambulance].

And I was like, 'are you fucking kidding me?' It was by far the most fucked up [sic] thing I've ever seen."

En route to the hospital, Chief Paramedic Ken Martin notes Mr. McMahon's seizure-related cardiac abnormality and injects three milligrams of atropine into the patient's left arm. Technician Brent Ryder alleges McMahon, "Huffed deeply and let out a wet bark. Then he started growlin' and his fingernails started growin' and so did the hair on his arms. Like outta a movie or somethin'. His eyes were bright yellow and I'll tell ya they looked right through me." Despite Ryder's concerted efforts to subdue him, "[McMahon] tore out those intravenous lines and snapped off them restraining belts like a coupla of rubber bands."

Emergency Dispatch Monitoring confirms, "a loud shrill" and "significant power failure" within the ambulance. NH State Police issue an All-Points Bulletin for James "Big Mac" McMahon.

3.

From The Old Farmer's Almanac (Yankee Publishing: 1998), p.54:

"Expect a Full Wolf Moon throughout these exquisite Spring months, with strong tidal forces through all solstice points [...] Best Days to kill wild onions, castrate a bull, and harvest monkshood [...] a tea of chamomile, bee balm and mint are unparalleled for menstrual disorders [...] Mr. Jim Brooks reclines in his lawn chair and gazes at the stars. He likens the fabric of space-time to panty-hose; our consciousness mere wrinkles in the hosiery. [...] Mercury will be in retrograde from May 20th through May 30th [...] livestock farmers in and around [Northern New Hampshire] advised to shelter their grazing animals due to likelihood of lycanthropy."

4.

Merrimack College

Dean Howard K. Chase postpones the commencement exercises indefinitely and instructs the unruly student body to vacate the grounds immediately.

Campus police arrest three students—including Class Valedictorian Terone Delvon Jones. Jones refuses to leave the stage, demanding, "to know what just fucking happened."

Jones recounts one officer asked him, "to put my hands where he could see 'em. So I told him that's gonna be a little hard—seeing how I was wearing a

robe and all." Jones proclaims, "Shit got real. He asked me if I was [carrying a gun]. No shit. So I told him I forgot my [AK-47] in the library. Then he goes, 'you're going to get shot with backtalk like that'... [rent-a-cop] cuffed me right in front of my parents. Everyone booed [rent-a-cop] and threw shit at him."

5.

May 22nd 1998

NH State Trooper Ben Noyes locates the ambulance in a ditch off Route 112. Noyes declares the crash scene, "a war zone." Photos accompanying his report illustrate a mangled cab, a patient cot saturated with blood, the drug cabinet torn asunder. Two noteworthy details from the narrative section of Noyes' report are his discoveries that vehicle's onboard computers are soaked in urine and the Emergency Medical Services Driver is decapitated.

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6.

From The Complete Werewolf Compendium, by Edgar Overton Edmonds (University of Wisconsin Press: 1989), p.45:

"Grey wolves have exceptional geographical distribution and a long, contentious relationship with humans...Canis lupus exhibits superior auditory perception and acute night vision ... [The alpha male] needs only eye contact as an indicator of his dominance. If threatened, he will utilize scent and scratch markings for territorial advertisement. He prefers higher elevations in mating and shelter. Most of his dens face north, per direction [of the planet Mercury]...research from the University of Michigan Department of Wildlife Science confirms these apex predators' can bite through bone and steel... intelligence easily surpasses their amicable cousins [the canine]... [The Werewolf] origins are rooted in genetic mutations, testosterone surges, other-world influences and old-fashioned opportunism. Epictetus (Lycanthropy and Freedom of Action) identifies

Werewolves as, "Earth's most impressive, most perilous creature." [...] The wolf-man represents the worst attributes of both species: a loner—the antisocial, paranoid, egoistic, emotionallyunstable,libidinous, and intensely aggressive outcast. Hopeless nihilism. He's a schizoid personality in a Dionysian frenzy...Is it any wonder the Nazis named Hitler's headquarters Werwolf? Unable and unwilling to join packs or social groups, the lycanthrope is incapable of compassion or cooperation [...] The wolf-man harnesses a mythical vigor necessary for an enduring solitary existence. He is forever stewing in a deep well of melancholia and history shows us he'll destroy anyone, anything, in his dismally dim path."

7.

May 27th 1998.

NH State police K-9 Units survey the crash site and surrounding area. Two cadaver dogs (Twin beagles "Biggie" and "Benny") locate a corpse in Newichwannock pond. T h e Medical Examiner transports the carcass to Mount Pierce Hospital.

8a.

From The Best of the Boob Tube, (Entertainment Weekly, April 9th, 2000) by Jackson Philbrick:

"The die is cast. Last night NBC premiered the one show everyone's been dying to see—the uber-hyped, docu-drama, "Attack of the Mac!". The live global broadcast broke total viewership records with a Nielsen Rating of 63 [...] I found myself disgusted with our fatally-flawed protagonist and, at the same time, wanting to buy our rebel-hero a beer [...] "Attack!" plunders the cold case files of James "Big Mac" McMahon and examines the original manuscript of McMahon's schlocky novel, The Man with the Million Dollar Sneeze. [...] Thankfully, it doesn't take long for "Attack!" to move from the clerical and mundane to the cheesy and delicious. Show-runner Denny Harlane opens the second hour as, "a professional photographer capturing life in shadows." He's our, "Architect of Anarchy," his crew, "Paranormal Pirates." [...]"Attack!" excels when Harlane and gang take it to the streets. Awesome highlights: bribing federal law enforcement agents, humiliating a Merrimack College alumnus, breaking into a research facility and purloining werewolf DNA samples [...] Harlane needed a change of

pace from his last project—the disappointingly-mild slapstick, My Alien Parents. [...] Alleged footage of Big Mac is grainy [...] Mr. Harlane demonstrates the testicularity we all expect of him. He manages to top those notorious exploits of Operation King Contact—when the world watched in awe as Harlane breeched the walls of Graceland with his M1A1 Abrams tank and attempted to unearth Elvis on live T.V. [...] One bold move in "Attack!" occurred in a mysterious Granite State cemetery (under the pale light of a Full Moon, no less). Harlane commandeers a backhoe and disinters three corpses, identifying a fourth as "our jackpot." When those armed guards started firing on him, Harlane qualified as bad-ass in my book. [...] But Denny, where's that cadaver you promised us? And what happened to that God-forsaken freak from New Hampshire? And who exactly was Leidekker? We don't get any answers—but at least Harlane's take on America's Favorite Werewolf is eminently watchable. [...] "Attack of the Mac!" grinds to a halt with a much-discussed cliffhanger ending. [...]NBC's not only back in business—this network's gonna make a killing."

8b.

Highlights of Chief Coroner's report on the corpse found in Newichwannock pond:

"...dental records are difficult to scrutinize. Severe damage to subjects' gum and tooth matter, likely a result from: long-term abuse of chewing tobacco products, excessive consumption of high-fructose corn syrup, gross negligence in the area of oral hygiene maintenance and possible foul play. Nonetheless, one segment of the recovered jaw from carcass was matched with an X-Ray film of Mr. McMahon's left bite-wing..."

"...toxicology screen positive: diazepam, codeine, THC, risperidone, dextroamphetamine ... elevated blood ethanol level of two hundred milligrams per deciliter. Serological screening for Sexually Transmitted Infections tests positive: syphilis, herpes simplex virus, human papillomavirus, gonorrhea and crab louse [...] Postmortem examination reveals signs of a struggle and a terminal erection. [...] This examiner has serious doubt [the cadaver] can be identified as Mr. McMahon's. Cause of death is undetermined. After

adjusting for decomposition and purification, this cadaver's weight does not match [Mr. McMahons'] last recorded measurements [...] DNA results pending FBI processing [...]

9.

June 9th 1998.

The Chief Medical Examiner of Merrimack County determines cause of death by cardiac arrest via a myocardial infarction. The body is cremated by T.J.'s Affordable Cremation and Funeral Services, LLC.

10.

From Tao of Change: Tales of Chuang-Tzu, by Clarence Bergeron (Meridian Press: 1989), p. 45:

Chuang Tzu listened to his student Hui Tang explain how his father hunted. 'He is a foolish man,' said Chuang Tzu. 'What do you mean?' asked Tang. Chuang Tzu replied, ' Wolves, tigers and lions are benevolent. They possess their bodies with ease and embrace all transformations. A hunter merely possesses his weapon and a lack of Yang in his sexual organ.' The student considered this and asked, 'But are those beasts not savages? They say a were-wolf is savaging our village.' Master Chuang laughed and examined a tuft of his beard. 'Benevolence is the very highest thing. The only savageness I've known lives in the heart of the man believing himself superior. As far as this talk of a fiend preying on villagers—perhaps your father will get a taste of his own medicine.' Tang sat in silence with his Master for some time, until Master Chuang continued, "Beauty of formlessness! Only an animal can cast off its body—just as an insect sheds its skin. Indeed! This is the heart of the Tao—the wilderness, the endless transformation. Mother Earth rejects all dimensions of captivity and destructions. This Werewolf, this so-called beast, is no longer human, nor is he human. Therefore, he is the Ideal form of the Tao—a bridge between Fear and Flesh—rising above that dark maw full of rank, ego and reward.' Tang nodded. 'Master. Your words are a Path to the Way, and I do thank you for them.' Chuang Tzu studied a butterfly fluttering onto his arm. He spoke gravely. 'Hui Tang, you are wrong. Dunce! You must stop thanking and start thinking.'

11.

ly 2nd 2000

Vacationing with her amily in the Passaconaway Campground in the White Mountain National Forest, Molly Ableson, age nine, of North Miami Beach, Florida, spots, "A big hairy wolf-man run really fast across the woods. My Mom and me heard something howl and my Daddy went outside our cabin with a flashlight and when I looked out the window I saw this big hairy monster wave his arms and run back into the woods. He was howling. Really loud, too. Last year my brother saw a dragon fly away from a helicopter [...] it was really scary. Mom made hot cocoa for me and we waited for my Daddy to get back. When Daddy came back inside he had peed in his pants."

12.

From The Lost Notebooks of Sigmund Freud, by Sigmund Freud, (Modern Library: 1998) pg.90:

"During the year of 1898 I toiled on the subject of memory in [psychoanalysis]. In self-analysis the danger of incompleteness is particularly great. One is too soon satisfied with a part explanation [...] a burst of exhilaration via my cocaine tincture brought fresh insight. It is evident the cases of [monsters] reported by subjects represents a treasure trove for us in the business of analysis. We ought not to concern ourselves with the ogres of childhood that appear in dreams, but, rather, those in everyday life [...] the werewolf represents everything about a vagina that terrifies the neurotic man. Here is the potential for the woman to entangle, entrap, and consume him. Potent symbolism at work here [illegible] The Werewolf is distilled primal rage. Indeed, he is all that the regressed man runs from. Endowed with immortality, only he can give complete sexual gratification to a woman. Eros incarnate! [...]In spite of our pathetic defenses, the lycanthrope forces us to confront all we fear when our attempts at self-preservation fail [...] As a distinguished researcher, my professional obligation is to dispense the 5% solution of liquid joie de vivre into my mouth. Seconds later a complete numbing of tongue, lips and awakening my libido [...] Must send letter to Dr. Koller and request larger vial of Merck cocaine alkaloid solution. Also request preferred route of administration of Coca to maximize effect of drug and reduce tolerance... Offer analysis of his daughter Elizabeth quid pro quo [page

torn] [...] Dear Lycanthrope! You represent all the impish neurotic man cannot do: you bring forth both Life and Death. I, for one, envy your triumphs! [...] [The Werewolf] is [penis envy]; and [castration anxiety] at a monstrous scale. This is no monster; this is a construct of the raw psyche, freed from centuries of enslavement. Good God! This is a beauty—a perfect and timeless symbol."

13.

From Counsel with a Jedi Knight: The Lost Interviews of George Lucas, by Victor Allen (Del Rey Books: 2007), p.63:

[George Lucas sits in his meditation room hidden away within the sprawling complex known as Skywalker Ranch, looking out at the gloaming of a cold autumn day. On the wall, a picture of him standing in front of a phalanx of Imperial Stormtroopers—the creator with his creations.]

Victor Allen: The original Star Wars films were wildly popular. They became cultural unifiers. However, your prequels were ravaged by many of those same fans. Did this hurt?

George Lucas: Not really. I'm used to it. I got lots of grief for [Return of the Jedi]. They told me the Ewoks were juvenile and Cloud City looked fake. But I really don't give a good goddamn what any fourth-rate critic or fan-boy thinks of my creative world.

VA: Looking back at all of the monsters you've dreamed up, do you have a favorite?

GL: [shakes head] Well, first of all, I wouldn't call them monsters. The word suggests abnormality and evil. I create characters—all of whom are well-adjusted on their home planets. [Pause] but I guess my favorite is...Chewbacca. Basically, Chewbacca's just a warm and fuzzy werewolf. That's it. A kinder, gentler wolfman. All the Wookies are. Same goes for Ewoks.

VA: Are there any characters whose stories we haven't heard yet?

GL: Oh, sure. But we're all in

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that boat. I think—Jabba the Hut— [laughing] I kind of miss Jabba, actually—I've got a running list of people for him to send to the Sarlacc.

VA: And how do you create a character like Jabba? What's the inspiration there?

GL: Well, see, with Jabba, I really wanted to teach the audience something. They loved everything Star Wars so—[clears throat] so what's that quote? 'One never learns to understand anything truly but what one loves.' Goethe, I think. Right? So I captivated a generation by the time [The Empire Strikes Back]. That was the easy part. That was why it wasn't enough...One night I had a vision of [laughs nervously] of a... galactic crime lord. He's always the largest creature in the room. He's lardaceous, he's slimy...he's living large in a palace full of monsters and sex slaves. [Points finger] But he's shrewd.

VA: He looked like nothing anyone had ever seen on film. He certainly was frightening.

GL: Yeah, he does look hideous...he really let himself go by [Return of the Jedi] but it's Jabba's behavior that's really deplorable. Jabba's behavior surpasses all kinds of evil. His penchant for torture, lust for power. It's worse than the Dark Side. Much, much worse than any Dark Force [inaudible]. Inspiration for that...I really don't know...I don't want to know...

VA: There was a sobering element in [Return of the Jedi]. A solemn tone that—

GL: No, not really. I remember... we were out in Tunisia filming, and I knew [Princess Leia] had to wear a metal bikini. She just had to. Jabba wanted it, so I designed it [hands on his breasts] and built it and...it happened. And you know I still get thanked for that?

VA: Amazing.

GL: Yeah. [Sighs] Well, you strike a chord with our culture and it's [pause]—you know, I was about to mass-market that metal bikini but—look, like I said, the worst thing people do in [Hollywood] and, really, in life is to get too comfortable. I've always believed that.

VA: And by that you mean excess?

GL: No. I mean getting sloppy. Underestimating the dangers... what happens when...we get complacent. For an artist that manifests as stagnation. Or compromising on your vision. I guess for normal people that means [Shrugs] Getting fat and lazy and clinical and ...

materialistic.

VA: My guess is that [Industrial Light and Magic] is a very, very busy place.

GL: Actually, you're wrong. I like peace and quiet. This [motions to room] was the inspiration for [Darth Vader's Meditation Chamber] which [laughing] I'll take over a palace any day.

VA: You've mentioned Jabba—

GL: Look, any mythical beast—like the werewolf, for example, is enduring. It has to be. And either this creature continues to exist somewhere on Earth—owing to some immoderate mental and physical strength—or the archetype is just so powerful we'll never let go.

VA: And like the werewolf the Jedi can harness these extraordinary powers, correct?

GL: Sort of...both bespeak mind over matter...Jabba never wanted [Luke Skywalker] in his palace. He refused him admittance. Now think about that. Some stranger shows up, puts a bomb right up to Jabba's face and he's not fazed. Yet, this un-armed, soft-spoken guy in a robe threatens him. Why? Because he knows Jedi Knights are the wrong kinds of enemy to make. Jabba knows he can't buy the Force or bully it and it scares the shit out of him. [Laughs] Of course, he ignores his own advice—and pays for it with his life. So that lesson, that every monstrous thought, every monstrous action has consequences, that's what I demonstrated...hoped to, at least. Whether people understood it is out of my hands."

15.

October 1st 1999

Miraculous Mattress Outlets Inc. declares Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

16.

From The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, (Harvard University Press: 1951), p.81:

"DEAR SIR,--Because of the aforementioned illness I write this from my bed. Yes, I do think it bears repeating, that ones' greatest companion ought be the Woods. For it knows but it does not tell! The waves of green are so pensive—they only looketh to see the Moon. Therein them lies a deep Eternity few can fathom....In response to your question: there is no Present, Past or Future—every adult experiences Decay and Despair when they deny this fact. This insight came to me via a four-year old girl named Poppy who delivers my newspaper to me every

afternoon. Poppy is the daughter of one of my father's associates, and has a Conscious Ear and a Celestial Face. You also asked about my shaggy and reticent ally, Carlo. This velvety-eared vagabond followed me outside last week, and together under the pale light of a Full Moon we strolled our lonely trail. In the great distance we caught a neighbor from another world. His howl breached the Heavens! A beast with immeasurable bulk! Long arms covered in frenzied hair reached out into no-thingness. O! How I yearned for them to hold me in their gauzy nest! Immensely Beloved beast! So full of solemnity was he that my hands clapped in Ecstasy. I waved at him—and he waved back! Tis little hope we have to outlive, outmaneuver, such Immortal skin-walkers of these ample Woods. I called out to him but as soon as he made his presence known, he was gone with Doom's celerity. Together we heaved telepathic sighs. For we are both doomed to Eternal isolation and misunderstanding! So much tragedy in one walk! Does this give you an answer as to how I spend my days here in my room? -Your Friend, E.

17.

From Monsters are due in Manchester (Esquire magazine, March18th, 2000) by Jackson Philbrick:

"MIT's Leidekker Examining Group left us with more questions than answers. Let's start with what we know. We know Dr. Bill Leidekker witnessed—in a controlled environment—a human being demonstrate "shape-shifting" abilities. But we also know the bulk of Leidekker's observations, narratives and so-called "proof" of her mythological powers have since been denied, denounced or destroyed.

At the end of the day, we can all agree that people want to believe in this nonsense. They don't need academics to sweeten the pot. The bored, bloated, narcotic-popping general public dreams of the supernatural and yearns for the otherworldly. Always have, always will. And

"You also asked about my shaggy and reticent ally, Carlo. This velvety-eared vagabond followed me outside last week, and together under the pale light of a Full Moon we strolled our lonely trail.

who can blame them? Faced with a Godless, meaningless existence, they run for cover. Americans are on a perpetual quest for the magical, the mystical, the metaphysical—and they won't let a nuisance like the truth stand in their way. Never underestimate the power of bias."

18.

October 9th 2003

Little, Brown and Company reprints Big Mac's Bildungsroman, The Man with the Million Dollar Sneeze. It catapults to the top of The New York Times Best Seller list, staying there a record sixty-three weeks. Jack Nicholson narrates the audiobook version. Despite unprecedented commercial success, critical reception is mixed.

Kara McAllister of the Boston Globe states, "Initially published in obscurity long before his infamous death, James 'Big Mac' McMahon's re-packaged, re-booted, hard-covered opus is an unsettling mix of pain, pity and perversion." The New Times Book Review includes it in the "100 Notable Books of the Year," yet the paper-magazine also bemoans, "What has never been alive cannot very well go on living." In The New Yorker, Jerry Jermaine expounds, "We've all been subjected to the twisted legends regarding [Mr. McMahon's] mysterious demise. Finally, something straight from the source [...] unflinching [...] it's a literary high-wire act. Our so-called 'Werewolf of London' delivers a mise en abyme. Indeed, the indomitable, inscrutable Big Mac proves there are second acts in American lives [...] Text with all the subtlety of a Samuel L. Jackson performance. [...] beyond the ballyhoo, this is a gloomy—yet surprisingly redemptive—tour de force." Lastly, Andrew Dickinson of Publishers Weekly declares the tome, "a hot mess of hype [...] an editor's nightmare and a publisher's wet dream [...] I expected something wolfish—instead I got Call of the Mild [...] lurid [...] Boring stuff of the wrist-slitting kind. McMahon writes as only a dilettante can: with desperate flashiness, showing and telling his way through a real shit-show."